



# Twenty Four

The Magazine of XXIV Squadron Association



Issue 17

95th Anniversary Edition

Summer 2010

## VIP Issue



Twenty Four is the Newsletter of 24 Squadron RAF Association and issued once a year to all members.

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## The Photo Album -



**Members and guests take it easy in the RAF Lyneham Station Briefing Room and checking out the exhibits in the newly refurbished History Room during the 2009 Reunion**



**Cover Photo courtesy of Mr. J Westley Walsall who was an AC1 on the Squadron at Bassingbourn in 1948**



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## Editorial



This issue is sadly back to Black and White in hard copy BUT still colour on the web, take a peek if you can. One of the quickest methods of broadcasting news, events gossip is our [Blog Book](#). Use has been made of this medium to post updates between Newsletters, especially for items about XXIV and RAF Lyneham that appear in the local Wiltshire paper. Do try it out, give it a browse and add your own comments.

It has been a quiet few months Association wise since the last Reunion but on the positive side our membership has grown, with at least 12 new members along with a very well supported Summer Social this year. We must be doing something right.

Be sure to grab the opportunity to come along to this years reunion on the **2nd October 2010** as you will see that Lyneham and the Squadron's days are running out before it up sticks to Brize Norton.

### Editor

David Burgin

### Association President

Air Com Dick Gould

### Association Committee

- Keith Chapman - Chairman
- Sam Wright - Dep. Chair
- Keith Rayner - Treasurer
- David Burgin - Secretary

### Squadron Liaison

W/C Andy Bacon (21 May 08)  
F/L Donny Walker

## The 94th Anniversary Reunion

### Reunion Report for Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2009

For all of you not able to attend the Reunion's, this article is a belated attempt to give you a bit of a feel of what the day is like. So let's put my hasty notes back into some form of narrative and see if we can recapture a little bit of the occasion.

A slightly different format faced the regulars this year as the day was centred around the Station Briefing Room and adjacent crew room. The reason for not being able to congregate in the old haunts was soon revealed, namely that with the run down of the Station prior to moving to Brize Norton, the general level of décor was starting to look a bit jaded. As it turned out, the new location proved very satisfactory and quite cosy on such a blustery and cloudy day.

Wing Commander Andy Bacon was well supported by his Executive Officers and Squadron Liaison team who gave up their valuable free time to make us all feel most welcome. After parking the AGM to one side, we all came together for a series of presentations by both the current serving offices and an ex OC XXIV, Chris Carrington. This was followed later by lunch, a raffle, trips around the airfield, Air Traffic control, Simulator rides and viewing of the newly refurbished History Room.

First up was a timely reminder of what was going on in Afghanistan. The emphasis was centred on a Hearts and Mind philosophy with such examples as leaflet drops, medical aid for the civilian population and building up the countries infrastructure; the successful installation of a large water turbine to generate electricity being the best example. It is an every day occurrence for the battle front to call in air support

## URGENT Editor Wanted

To allow the current Editor to concentrate on the Association Web Site's development, the job of Newsletter Editor is up for grabs. Ideally suit anyone with reasonable IT skills, e-mail access and keen on Aviation research. You will enjoy this opportunity to give the current Newsletter a make over and reach a readership of 300 members each year.

You would work closely with the Secretary and Web Site Author to ensure a seamless end product. Full details and background from Assoc Sec.



*(Continued from page 3)*

with heavy pressure to say “yes” to all requests. The C130J is especially suited for precision dropping of containers, day or night and can dispense fuel on the ground to Chinooks for their important missions to Forward Outpost Bases, which includes air support to all the NATO countries operating in theatre.

We were shown an example of typical log book entries for someone engaged in Operation Herrick who are detached into theatre for 4/5 weeks 2/3 times a year. The crews are pushed right up to the maximum legal limit of flying time. XXIV Squadron aircraft are also used to fly VIP’s around Afghanistan, a role that harks back to WWII duties.

On return to the UK, there are plenty of other tasks to complete, one of the more famous being the mercy mission to save the Stronorway twins, which incidentally involved a French exchange officer as the captain of the flight. Along with a variety of charitable jobs such as Help the Heroes, the British Forces Foundation and the Squadron’s newly affiliated charity CALM (Children’s Cancer and Leukaemia Movement), everyone is fully committed.

An important piece of work to look after the heritage of the Squadron is being undertaken by Major Todd Shugart on exchange for the USAF. Todd is a self confessed aircraft history geek, with a special weakness for the Hastings and Badges. The entire history collection has been reorganised and catalogued on a timeline, sensitively laid out in the display cabinets and the photographs remounted in specially embossed albums.

The new albums appeals is a mini project in its own right and being promoted by S/L Al Tano. To date, they have been sponsored for and ordered 3, which cover the years 1991-2000 (Worshipful Company of Carmen), 2001-2010 (XXIV Sqn Assoc), and 2011-2020 (Clive & Sheila Harley). Note – If you have some memorabilia you wish to donate, please feel free to send it to XXIV Squadron for the attention of Major Todd Shugart – it will be well cared for.

As a reminder of what the Squadron were up to 25 years ago, ex OC XXIV, Chris Carrington

stepped up to the stage to recount what went on in 1983, some 9 months after the end of the Falklands War. It was all about the Air Bridge and the very long logistic pipeline down to the South Atlantic. The Herc was now put in the role of airborne refueller with other aircraft and resupplying the Islands, as initially it was the only aircraft able to land at Stanley. It was a complex planning operation which involved quite a few different aircraft types with varied upper and lower speed limits to accommodate and long duration flight sectors. Crews at Stanley would be away typically for 4 months at a time and perform the airborne roles of Fighter Refuelling and Air Sea Rescue duties. *(see full article on page ?)*

The rest of the day concluded with a variety of events from the programme, but sadly not a flight in the local area, as the high level turbulence and the cargo compartment of Hercules are not the best places to be. Our thanks to Sam Wright who organised an impromptu raffle for the bottle of Champagne donated by Norma Hagon and the level of interest found by all those in the new History Room *[see photo album page]*.

The evening was rounded off as ever with a first-rate Ladies Guest night in the Officers Mess where the Association invite along the serving members to show our appreciation for the fine work they continue to do. The number of times we will be able to take advantage of the facilities of either mess at Lyneham is rapidly coming to an end as flying is scheduled to cease at the base from September 2011 onwards. So until the next Reunion

**In Omnia Parati.**



## A Message from the Chairman to all Members

### Association Fund

You will recall that it was agreed at last year's AGM that we should issue an appeal for voluntary donations to top up the Association Fund. This decision followed a briefing by our Treasurer in which he drew attention to a potential shortfall unless we took timely and appropriate action to bring expenditure more into line with income. I am delighted to let you know that this appeal – the first for 10 years - was highly successful, raising over £2000 thanks to your outstanding generosity and support.

In parallel with this healthy injection of capital, your Committee has undertaken a detailed review of Association expenditure and income with the aim of strengthening our balance sheet on a permanent basis. Inevitably, this review has led to the conclusion that significant cost-saving measures need to be implemented forthwith. Outlined below for your information, these cut-backs will of course be explained and debated in depth at our AGM on 2 October 2010, when Members will be able to vote for or against their permanent implementation.

First, we have reluctantly concluded that the Fund can no longer afford the entire cost of providing a coach between Swindon and the dinner venue. We therefore propose with immediate effect to charge Members £5 per head (£10 per couple) for the return trip. We recognise that this coach service is much appreciated by Members, not least because it removes all the hassle and expense of organising individual taxis and gaining access to the Station. However, by charging these modest fees, the Fund will benefit according to the number of users (eg if 36 people use the coach at £5 per head, this will save the Fund £180). However, the Fund will continue to underwrite any shortfall in covering the cost of the coach. This year our Deputy Chairman has managed to book a 49 seater at a cost of £212 – which is about £65 cheaper than last year.

Second, the Committee believes we should reduce the cost of providing music at dinner. Accordingly, our Deputy Chairman has booked a quartet for our next dinner at the very reasonable cost of £150. This compares with a fee of £250 to £300 now charged by most bands.

Third, the Committee has agreed to keep the price of the dinner itself as affordable as possible by limiting it to three courses this year. For £40 per head or thereabouts, we can continue to enjoy a substantial meal for a price that will include pre-dinner aperitifs, wines with the food and a glass or two of port. Liqueurs will not be included in the basic price. Please be reassured that both your President and Committee feel most strongly that the dinner should continue to be a very special occasion with high quality food and wines, albeit without a cheeseboard.

Fourth, the Committee has concluded that the existing high cost of producing and distributing our annual magazine/newsletter in part colour format is unsustainable. Printing and postage cost nearly £900 in 2009 so it is clear that expenditure on this scale must be radically trimmed back. Accordingly, the Editor (who is also our Secretary) has confirmed that the 2010 edition of the magazine/newsletter will be **printed only in black and white**. He will also produce a **part colour version in electronic format only** which will be posted on the Association website but not distributed in hard copy. We anticipate savings of approximately £200 per annum from making this change.

To sum up, your President and Committee believe that prompt implementation of these measures - which in aggregate represent an annual saving of some £500 - is essential if the Association is to live within its means and rebuild its balance sheet. Nevertheless, as noted above, these actions need to be discussed and approved by Members at our next AGM before they can be formally and permanently adopted as future policy.

I very much look forward to meeting you at Lyneham on 2 October 2010.

**Keith Chapman**  
**Chairman**  
**XXIV Sqn Association**



## RAF Mail Service to Malta - WWII

*The role XXIV played in the mail service to Malta has been mentioned in previous issues and with those copies now on the Internet, they prompted the following, which has amounted to a an article in itself. Read what transpired from Alan Green in Stockport:-*

During the course of some research for a paper on the Postal History of Malta during World War II, I have come across a file on open access at the National Archives, Kew, that refers to a 'Secret Mail Service from the UK to Malta and the Middle East'.

This service appears to have been started in 1940 by No. 24 Squadron RAF using three Wellington 1c aircraft, although I can find no reference to this operation on your website. I have attached a MS Word document that is a transcription of a couple of the documents in the Kew file and I wonder if this information is of interest to you.

Also, whether any of your Association members have any further information to supplement the basic details from Kew. In particular, whether the Squadron Operational logbooks make reference to this operation, when it actually started and which aircraft (tail numbers) were used. Alan's intention is to continue transcribing the copies of file documents, as the quality is poor and does not lend itself to further photo-copying.

### RAF Mail Service UK to Malta 1940

#### Background & Data Source

The entry of Italy into the WW2 conflict in June 1940 immediately caused the cessation of Imperial Airways/BOAC air services through the Mediterranean region. This in turn caused Malta to lose its regular scheduled air service from the U.K., which had been started in 1939 from Hurn via Bordeaux.

There was no organised equivalent service from the military and the adverse effect on morale due to lack of speedy personal mail facilities was considered significant enough to warrant setting up an RAF operation with high levels of secrecy.

The National Archives at Kew holds a file on open access, reference AIR 2/4628, titled "RAF Secret Mail Services to Malta and the Middle East – Administrative Arrangements". The contents of this file have been transcribed, copying the text as faithfully as possible. The originals have many manuscript entries and amendments, which are difficult to copy exactly, but the "strikethrough" tool within MS Word has been used as far as possible to show the deletions. For manuscript additions & amendments, the new text is shown in **bold italics**.

The documents are organised pretty much in chronological order, the only exceptions being cypher messages where replies are grouped with the initial message.

### Document #1 (undated)

#### General Instructions for RAF Mail Service to Malta and the Middle East

##### The object of the service

A service is to be started immediately to convey urgent official passengers, mail and equipment to and from Egypt, Malta and England.

##### Scope

The service is to be available for other Government Departments.

##### Aircraft

24 Communications Squadron is to operate the service with 3 Wellingtons.



Frequency of service

The service is to be maintained on a weekly basis each way but as the route lies over enemy occupied territory it is to be flown at irregular intervals.

Route

The route chosen is to be that which best combines speed and safety. Whenever and wherever possible preference is to be given to that route which most nearly avoids flying over or near enemy territory. Occupied France should normally be crossed at the narrow strip on the West Coast. Care is to be taken to avoid following exactly the same route too often. Till further experience of the route has been obtained the stations of arrival and departure are to be :- Hendon, St. Eval, Luca, Heliopolis

Time of departure

The times of departure are to be regulated by O.6. Air Ministry, the O.C. No. 24 Squadron, and by H.Q. R.A.F. Middle East and H.Q. R.A.F. Malta to ensure that whenever enemy territory has to be approached or crossed it is done at night.

Arms and Crew

As the aircraft will be crossing enemy territory a full operational crew and full equipment of guns, and ammunition, are to be carried.

Use of W/T

The greatest care is to be taken to avoid giving away the position of the aircraft, but D/F bearings may be requested if there is any danger of the aircraft not otherwise reaching safety.

Degree of importance of the service

O.C. St.Eval, H.Q. R.A.F. Malta and H.Q. R.A.F. Middle east are to be instructed by O.6. that the highest importance is attached to the safety and rapidity of this service.

On no account may the aircraft be used for other purposes whilst at Malta or Egypt.

Safety Factors

The Captain of the aircraft is solely responsible for obtaining weather forecasts and deciding whether or not the flight is to be started. The safe delivery of mails and passengers is the primary object. No unnecessary risks are to be taken and action with hostile aircraft is to be avoided if possible.

Arrangements for departure

E.35 is to arrange with O.C. 24 Squadron the approximate date of departure from England, and is to notify those concerned including O.6. He is also to inform the Chief Registrar when and where the mail is to be handed in. The Chief Registrar is to inform other Service Departments.

Load

The load is to be restricted to 1200\* lbs. This is for the carriage of passengers, equipment and mails of a very urgent nature, but is to include also a certain amount of private mail for personnel at Malta, on which arrangements are in hand with the Post Office. S.9 is requested to inform the Government Departments of the very limited scope of this service, and inform departments in the Air Ministry of the final arrangements.

Classes of load to be carried

The number of passengers to be carried in each aircraft is limited to 3\*.

Mails are to include not more than 65 **100** lbs. of private mail, marked by a special distinguishing stamp for personnel at Malta.

Urgent equipment required for operational purposes is to be carried when such equipment is vital and cannot be delivered in time in any other way.

General order of Priority

Private mail for personnel at Malta, Official mail, Operational equipment as defined above, Army Liaison officers, Passengers on special duty

Sorting out of the load

E.35 is normally to arrange the loads to be taken and in cases where a decision on priority has to be taken it is to be referred to D.C.A.S. through D.O.O.

Secrecy of Mail

In order that the secret mail can be destroyed in the event of a forced landing on non-allied territory, the Government Departments are to be informed by S.9 that their secret mail is to be photographed and the negative only despatched in a single thin envelope. Everything not so prepared is to be treated as non-secret. The secret mail will be destroyed by fire by a self-destroying device if there is any danger of it falling into enemy hands. The Chief Registrar is to be responsible for putting the secret mail into special red bags.

Self-destruction of secret mail

O.C. 24 Squadron is responsible for ensuring that the secret bags are prepared for self-destruction.

The Captain of the aircraft is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made for the self-destroying apparatus to be employed whenever there is any danger of the aircraft being forced down in non-allied territory. Available

**A second document dated 13th August 1940 is available to anyone interested in following up this article.**



## 24 Squadron move to RAF Hendon - 1933

### The Best Flying Club in the World and Prelude to War

On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1933 the Squadron transferred to RAF Hendon, C flight formed under Flt Lt. H A Hammersley remaining at Northolt. C flight became the station Flight at RAF Northolt in January 1936, and a new C Flight was added to the establishment at Hendon. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1937 D Flight was formed to maintain aircraft allocated for the use of personnel on the strength of The Reserve and Inspector of Civil Flying Training Schools.

Lord Londonderry, the Secretary of State for Air, continued his flying training under Sqn Ldr Whitford after the squadron moved to Hendon, this time in Hawker Tomtit K1782. The extracts from the squadrons operational records held in the history room at RAF Lyneham don't record if he obtained his wings, but he did fly solo on numerous occasions, right up to 1935.

Throughout the years 1933 to 1939 the Squadron continued to receive new aircraft types. Some permanently, some on extended trial, and some for reasons that can only be guessed at.

#### THE NEW AIRCRAFT:

##### **De Havilland DH82 Tiger Moth I**

The first of these world famous trainers serials K.2568, K.2570, and K.2576 were issued to 24 Squadron in July 1933 and they were used for communications and training. Initially they were operated alongside the earlier Gypsy Moths, but eventually completely supplanted them in service. Twenty two out of the original thirty five Tiger Moths ordered for the RAF served at one time or another with 24 Squadron. They were extensively used and carried many VIPs during their years of service. The principle differences between the Tiger and Gypsy Moth were the inverted Gypsy III engine and the increased stagger between the top and bottom wing, with compensatory sweep back. This enabled the cockpits to be set back behind the upper wing, enabling easier access and egress.

##### **Avro 621 Tutor**

After the Avro Trainer (see Northolt Years article) had been evaluated it was decided that a more powerful engine was required, and the Armstrong Siddeley J Lynx was substituted. Avro Tutor K4809 was on charge in the spring of 1935 when it crashed during an Empire Air Day Display on the 23 May 1935. The Squadron also operated K3359, K4833, K4834 during 1936 and all three were subsequently used by the University of London Air Squadron based at Northolt. This ties in with C Flight operating from Northolt so I suspect there may be a connection there, more research is needed, so if anyone reading this has any information let me know.

##### **Hawker Hart Day Bomber and Hart Trainer**

In addition to the special Hart (Communications) version operated, the above standard versions were also operated. They were used for training and communications, and as a platform for flying umpires during air defence exercises. Aircraft Serial K3001 is shown in Putnam's "Aircraft of the RAF" wearing normal 24 Squadron markings, but with a large A on a white fuselage band instead of a roundel

##### **Hawker Audax**

The Audax was the Army Co-operation version of the Hart which first appeared in 1931, virtually identical to the Hart it can be distinguished by the long exhaust pipes which extend along the fuselage sides past the rear cockpit. Aircraft serials K2008, K7383 were both operated as trainers and for special flights. In Air Britain's magazine "Archive" published summer 2001 there is a picture of K2008 visiting Barton Airport (Manchester) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 1938. The normal 24 Sqn markings of a 24 on the fuselage & chevron on the fin appear to be missing but it has a star painted on the main wheel cover visible.

##### **Hawker Osprey III**

Yet another in the Hart series, the Osprey was developed a Naval fighter/reconnaissance aircraft for use on Aircraft carriers. Equipped with floats they were also issued a catapult launched spotter aircraft for use on cruisers. Four aircraft K3616, K3617, K3618 and K3619 were delivered in Mar/April 1934 and were used for a year. In Flight magazine on May 23 1935 they were listed as being on display at the next weeks Hendon Empire Air Day, which means they were seen by over 10,000 people on the 30<sup>th</sup> May.

As a Fleet Air Arm aircraft their use by a Communications squadron is baffling. I can only conjecture as to why they were chosen, perhaps being equipped with dinghies and flotation bags they were to be used for overseas flights! A picture in the RAF Museum collection of K3617 shows it with the squadron Chevron, and in Air Britains magazine Aeromilitaria No2 1994 K3616 is shown with 24 written on the fuselage. They differed in appearance from Harts in having a larger fin and rudder, and two pairs of support struts between the fuselage and lower wing. These supported

*(Continued on page 9)*



## 24 Squadron move to RAF Hendon - 1933 - cont

the lower wing at the folding point.

### De Havilland DH89 Rapide

On the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1935 a major step forward in comfort and capacity arrived for the squadron when K5070 a civil DH89 Rapide was delivered by De Havilland Ltd. Enclosed accommodation for both pilot and passengers was a first, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> April Prime Minister Ramsey Macdonald and the Foreign Secretary Sir J Simon were flown to Paris by Sqn Ldr Whitford. Over the next three years the Rapide was used extensively by VIPs flying with the squadron, often on tours of inspection. On the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1935 the new Foreign Secretary Sir S Hoare was flown to Geneva, returning on the 13<sup>th</sup> September. In November 1938 2 more Rapides P1764 and P1765 were delivered and they served until 1940 when one was struck off charge in April and the other lost in France.

The Rapide and its military counterpart the Dominie served 24 Squadron until 1943, many were impressed from civilian operators at the start of WWII, and were used extensively on transport duties to France. Nine were lost during that service, shot up on the ground by strafing Luftwaffe fighters, and also having to be abandoned owing to damage sustained from ground fire.

Two aircraft Z7258 Women of The Empire and Z7261 Women of Britain were fitted out as ambulance aircraft and after presentation by the "Silver Thimble Fund" were operated briefly from the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1941 by 24 Squadron.

### De Havilland DH 86B

Allocated to 24 Squadron on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1937 for use of members of the Cabinet and the Air Council, the DH86 serial L7596 was a four engined civil biplane airliner, formerly used by British Airways Ltd as G-ADYJ. In 1987 the publishers Putnam ran a series of advertisements for their latest books, and featured on the advertisement was L7596 sporting the squadron fighting cock emblem within a six pointed star on the nose and tail fin. In the background are a number of Fairey Swordfish, which could help locate the airfield, but despite my best efforts I cannot track down the photo collection that holds the original. So once again if any one can help me I would be very grateful.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> October L7596 and a civil DH86B G-AENR were flown to Mildenhall where three members of the German Air Force Mission were picked up and flown to RAF Cranwell. In November L7596 made two flights to and from Brussels with the Foreign Secretary.

All DH86 aircraft were built as civil aircraft but a number were both bought or impressed by the Air Ministry, in all nine were used by 24 Squadron, mainly after war was declared. The former G-ADYG, another British Airways aircraft, was allocated in June 1938 as N6246, which served until destroyed in a hangar fire in May 1942.

### Bristol 142 Britain First

This one off aircraft was designed in 1934 as fast communications type to the requirements of Lord Rothermere, the proprietor of the Daily Mail. He had expressed a desire to match the latest civil types coming out in America, such as the Boeing 247 and the Douglas DC2, and to show that British aircraft manufacturers could make more modern aircraft than those currently being officially specified. When it was tested in June 1935 it proved to be 50mph faster than the winner of the latest fighter ordered for the RAF, the Gloster Gladiator. It so impressed the testing pilots that the Air Ministry asked to keep it in order to evaluate its potential as a light bomber. Lord Rothermere then presented the aircraft, named "Britain First" to the Air Council.

The Bristol was then allocated serial K7557 and sent to various RAF units for test purposes, coming to 24 Squadron on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 1935 where it was kept until the 15<sup>th</sup> December.

Quite what the squadrons pilots made of this low wing monoplane with retractable undercarriage, two position propellers, flaps and a top speed of over 300mph one can only imagine. Especially given the aircraft they were used to, biplanes with fixed undercarriage, could barely reach 150mph.

The design of the Bristol 142 was developed into the 142M which became the Blenheim 1 in RAF service, and which served during WWII with every command despite its growing obsolescence as the war went on.

### Miles Nighthawk

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1937 a single Miles Nighthawk serial L6846 was allocated to the squadron for the use of C flight, the communications flight. This aircraft had been developed as a trainer and fast communications aircraft as a private venture by the very small aircraft company of Phillips and Powis, designed by F G & Blossom Miles a husband & wife team. It could carry three people in an enclosed cockpit and was as fast as the Hart (Communications) in use at the time. It was used over the next few months for a number of flights for the Secretary of State for Air, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> September was used to fly the Secretary of State for War to Le Bourget ( Paris ).

### Miles Magister

In 1936 the RAF ordered their first low wing monoplane trainer, the Miles Magister which was based on the earlier Hawk Trainer. Provided with flaps to reduce landing speed the Magister's overall performance was far better than the Tiger Moth and Avro Tutor it was ordered to supercede. 1,293 number aircraft were produced and at least 18 were to

*(Continued on page 16)*



Mailbox  Your Letters

**We do seem to have quite a lively bit of snail and e-mail traffic on issues featured in the Newsletter and long may it continue. So for your interest and comments, read on.**

**Ps - you can also comment on line at the BLog Book.**



My grandfather and his brother both either served, or were associated with, with the RFC 24 Squadron in WW1.

I am in possession of the original letter to the Air Ministry that recommends my grandfather, W.B. SWART to be a pilot in the RFC. Unfortunately, the top section of the letter is missing, so we do not know the date of it, but it is signed by the Squadron Leader Commanding of No. 24 (Communications) Squadron at the time. A copy of the letter is attached.

His brother, Major J.G. SWART was the Commanding Officer of the Squadron on 22 August 1917 (as per your web site). He is mentioned a number of times at: <http://www.apw.airwar1.org.uk/flying%20trq.htm> and won the Military Cross at the battle of the Somme.

The attached photograph is of my grandfather, W.B. SWART and my father, E.B.J. SWART, in South African Air Force uniform just before

WW2. My father served in the SAAF during WW2 and the Korean War and his younger brother, Derek Swart rose to the rank of Group Captain in the RAF.

If you have any further information about W.B. SWART in the squadron records, I would be very interested to know the facts.

Many thanks from Robin Swart



Hi there, I am researching my late Father's WW1 and Cold War Service RAF 1939-64. He had a long and varied service from Signals to Air Gunner and back to Signals.

On the 19th of October 1949 he joined 10 VIP Squadron at RAF Waterbeach as Flt Lt Signals Branch until its disbandment in Feb 1950 when he joined 24 VIP Squadron also at Waterbeach but in days it moved firstly to Basingbourn and then Oakington. With 24 Squadron he was I think on Valetta involved with VIP work as Qualified Signals Leader. He was only with 24 Squadron for a matter of months until he joined The King's Flight.

Could you please check your various research documents ORB's Etc and if you publish a newsletter could you please ask if anyone knew or flew with Tom/Nobby Clark.

Any information would be most welcome.

Yours sincerely Chris Clark e-mail [sirhcclark@btinternet.com](mailto:sirhcclark@btinternet.com) 3 Lilac Gardens, Crook, County Durham, DL15 9LU.



## Future Moves



### Brize becomes RAF's super-base

**Brize Norton is being transformed to host the RAF's new transports, making it a crucial hub for overseas operation**

THERE IS nothing immediately remarkable about the great greymetal bird that touches down on a crisp West Oxfordshire afternoon (writes Walter Scott). Except that this is one of two daily flights into RAF Brize Norton which bring troops home from Afghanistan and the fight against the Taliban. For the troops returning from the front line, the view from the Boeing C-17 is their first sight of Britain.

Brize began life as a training base in 1937. It was leased by the US Air Force from 1952 to 1965, became home to the VC10 fleet in the mid 1960's, and then to the TriStar passenger fleet in the early 1980s – primarily to serve an expanded Falklands garrison after the war there. Then, in 2001, the RAF's new fleet of massive C-17 transports began arriving.

Today, with its continual flow of military passengers to and from foreign destinations, Brize – or BZN to use its international airport code – has never been busier. As well as the buzzing passenger areas, there are warehouses processing pallets of supplies, and vehicles bustling around the tarmac.

But Brize is about to get busier. Next year RAF Lyneham will be closed, and its huge fleet of C-130 Hercules transports will relocate to Brize. Furthermore, the Airbus multirole aircraft will begin tak-

ing over from the TriStars and VC10s.

By 2012, nothing and no-one will leave the UK on a RAF flight without passing through Brize. It will be the RAF's largest base, and home to 15 per cent of the entire service. The base will be fundamental to military operations overseas. Preparations are well underway, and at the centre of the planning process, the military "Future Brize Team" is joined at the hip with Defence Estates.

"We cover everything from logistics and infrastructure to passengers," says Group Captain David Houghton, who heads Future Brize. "Operations, whether in Helmand or elsewhere, lie at the heart of everything we do here."

The pressure to deliver shows on an office noticeboard, which warns: "Fifty nine weeks to go until C-130 forward engineers arrive." Defence Estates is already delivering, primarily by laying a huge acreage of skin-smooth concrete for parking aircraft undergoing maintenance, and modernising the base's electrical infrastructure.

A vast new hangar, delivered under a private finance initiative with AirTanker Ltd, awaits the Airbus A330. Defence Estates will build a new hangar for the C-130s, along with freight and passenger-handling facilities, and new buildings for 47 Air Despatch Squadron.

Future Brize will cost £198m between now and 2020, but is expected to deliver savings of £437m. "There will be lower running costs, less requirement for investment in modernisation, and manpower savings," says Group Captain Houghton. The key, he says, is squeezing more from existing facilities: "We are not overburdened with resources, so we are focused on what is needed. We can't just knock down buildings. We are making the most of what we have got here."

"We will end up with a super-base for air transport and refuelling. People can be moved around more flexibly. We will focus on capabilities as required by the frontline." More people will mean more accommodation. Ageing barrack blocks have been demolished to make way for some 742 new junior ranks en-suite bedspaces being developed under Defence Estates' Project SLAM. A further 66 rooms for officers are being built, with plans for 50 rooms for senior NCOs to follow.

This aspect of the the development is, says Group

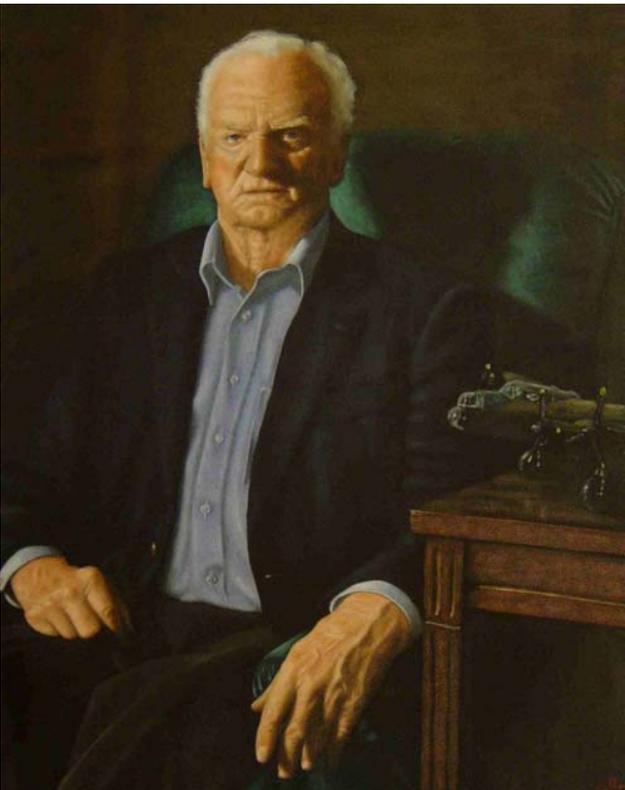
*(Continued on page 16)*



## The Photo Album -



Hastings after a drop and on the way back to Colerne in 1966. From Alan Pickering



Spotted this reference to Air Marshal Sir Richard Bolt, KBE, CB, DFC, AFC. Lancaster pilot with the Pathfinder Force, CO of No. 40 Squadron RNZAF, CO of No. 24 Squadron RAF, Chief of Air Staff RNZAF 1974-1976, Chief of New Zealand Defence Staff 1976-1980.



## Keeping in Touch - XXIV Squadron News



### **‘Lino’ from Lyneham knows the Force will be with him**

A large sign on the nondescript terminal building in the Wiltshire countryside offers a simple yet friendly greeting: “Welcome to Royal Air Force Lyneham”. Underneath it stands a small white marquee, in which the mood is forever sombre.

It is where the bereaved families wait for their husbands and sons, their wives and daughters, on their repatriation from Afghanistan; it is where a pastor is on hand to provide solace in their darkest hours.

Flight Sergeant John Flynn is all too familiar with the scene. When out on his lunchtime runs around the sprawling 2,500-acre airbase, he will slow to a stop and pay his respects as the funeral cortèges pass and his Forces colleagues make their final journey.

That he is keeping fit in his role as a Premier League assistant referee and that he will run the line at the FA Cup Final tomorrow pale into insignificance. The contrast of emotions, those that he feels week-on-week at Lyneham and those that he is certain to experience at Wembley Stadium tomorrow, could not be starker.

At times, Flynn, 41, finds it difficult to comprehend the consequences of the Afghan conflict. Discussing it is an ordeal, too, and he is wary that his comments could mistakenly be perceived as an invasion of personal privacy or a slur on those who have given their lives. That Lyneham is “honoured” to bring back the bodies is not easily understood by those who live off-base, those “outside the wire”.

Flynn nods his assent. “You feel strange saying that about someone who has died, but we are honoured to bring them back,” he says, falteringly. “You don’t ever come to terms with it. I felt the same with the first one [repatriation] as I did with the last one.”

His voice recedes to a whisper: “And, yes, there will be more.

“I train almost every day and, sometimes, when you see the hearses going down the road, you do think . . . it’s very sad when you see someone who was doing a similar job to ourselves has paid the ultimate price. It doesn’t knock you as such but . . . you try not to think about it.”

Sentences half-finished, lost in thought totally. Yet Flynn is not immune to the risks, either, as a loadmaster with the giant Hercules planes, the 70-tonne workhorses of the RAF. He supervises the loading of cargo or personnel on to the curiously nicknamed “Fat Alberts” and will accompany the captain, co-pilot and ground engineer on their missions above the Afghan badlands or on return trips home.

“The Hercules provides crucial support in Afghanistan, carrying out lots of different sorties,” Flynn says. “We carry passengers, can do drops, have patients on board. Sometimes, it can be quite stressful, bringing back people who have got hurt out there. But it’s just a job. You join the Armed Forces and if you ask someone to do something, they do it. You get on with it. That’s part of Forces life.”

*(Continued on page 14)*



## Keeping in Touch - XXIV Squadron News - cont

*(Continued from page 13)*

Try to delve deeper and Ministry of Defence restrictions kick in. Suffice to say, the Hercules C-130J has defensive aids that include a missile defence warning system that protects it from surface-to-air and air-to-air infrared-seeking weapons “that may be encountered during operations”. Flynn is not a foot soldier but the MoD deems him as operating in a “highly vulnerable environment”. He does not do joyrides.

Joy, satisfaction, pride. He will feel all of them simultaneously if tomorrow passes off without a questionable offside decision, without Carlo Ancelotti or Avram Grant questioning his right to be in the stadium let alone be alongside the same pitch as their prized and pampered players.

“We, all the match officials, don’t want to be seen,” Flynn says. “We will just try to make sure everything goes well, we don’t want anyone talking about us afterwards. We like to stay out of the limelight.”

Still, not a bad appointment — the pinnacle of his career as a “lino” — for the former South East Services League midfielder player. “I wasn’t very good,” he says. At 24, he was finished. After snapping a cruciate ligament, he was advised to avoid contact sport and so took up the whistle.

Flynn has done the hard yards, progressing through the Hayes & District Sunday League and, among others, the London Services, Northern Premier, Southern, Western and Hellenic leagues. In 2008, he lined at the FA Trophy final between Ebbsfleet United and Torquay United at the new Wembley. “What an occasion, what a stadium,” he said. “I really enjoyed it but the weekend just goes so quickly.”

When Flynn received the call last month, he was shopping with his wife, Catherine, and daughters, Amy, 15, and Lara, 6. “You won’t believe it,” he told the girls. “I’ve got the Cup Final.”

Catherine was swift to shatter his excitement. “But you’re not here,” she said. On the day of the Final, Flynn was due to be in Kandahar on another five-week stint — a prospective third visit to Afghanistan to go with his six trips to war-torn Iraq.

However, the RAF encourages its sporting headliners. Flynn contacted Wing Commander Andy Bacon, the officer commanding XXIV Squadron — more commonly known as “the boss” — and a deal was done. Flynn could delay his posting.

Bacon was adamant. “The Hercules Force is heavily committed to operations in Afghanistan and Flight Sergeant Flynn epitomises our people — fighting fit, dedicated and committed,” he said. “I look forward to deploying him to Kandahar later in the year, where I know, just as in the Final, he will keep a watchful eye on things and be firm yet fair.”

Less clear-cut is how Flynn will address Prince William, the FA president and an RAF search-and-rescue helicopter pilot, at Wembley. “My trade means that I could, at some stage, be one of his winchmen,” Flynn said. “Someone said to me that when I shake hands with him, I could say: ‘Hi, Sir, I could be working with you in a few years.’ Not that I would. It sounds so cheesy. Actually, I don’t think I’ve got the nerve.”

In his job Flynn has nerve aplenty. Today, it is only a game — a well worn yet, in the context, apt expression. “It’s right, absolutely,” Flynn says. “For me, for what I do, it puts everything in perspective. When you played football as a kid, you always wanted to be playing in a World Cup or FA Cup Final. And it’s just massive to be part of it. But, yes, it’s only a game.”

*Article by Russell Kempson from The Times 14 May 2010.*



## Keeping in Touch - Association

### RECENT LOSSES

We have only been informed of the following Association member passing away since the last AGM.

**“Bob” Stewart** passed away peacefully on the 10th May 2010. He had lung cancer but died of pneumonia. The funeral is on Thursday 20th May at 2-45 at the crematoria in Exeter. Bob was an ever popular crew member and ALM Leader on XXIV and would be well remembered. He used to attend our Reunions and support the Association as well as give his time to assisting the RAF charities and Association in the West Country.

**Flt Lt Jim Gray**, (not a member) died on September 15th 2009 aged 86. He had 3 tours as a 24 Squadron pilot during his RAF career; at Colerne on Hastings from 1959 - 1962, at Colerne on Hastings from 1964 - 1967; at Lyneham on Hercules from 1968 - 1971. He was nicknamed 'Zebedee' because of his moustache, and the popularity of Magic Roundabout at the time. When his tour finished in 1971 he was 48 and had reached the limit of his flying career so he left the RAF and took up various other jobs and interests before retiring to Northumberland with his wife Joan, who died earlier this year.

**Harry Harvey** Flt Lt Navigator on Hastings at Topcliffe and Colerne. 1950 - 1953 1958 - 1959

**Robert Likely** Sgt Fitter II E at Hendon Jun 1945 - Mar 1946

**Mike Woods** Flt Lt Pilot flying Hercules at Lyneham Jan 1968 - Oct 1970 and latterly with BA

### NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to an initiative of new OC XXIV, W/C Andy Bacon who probably had the Adj rustle up a list of those who left the Sqn in recent times, we can report a healthy influx to the membership list. A total of 13 new recruits have swelled the ranks and they are:-

F Name	L Name	Date on Sqn	Place on Sqn	Trade
Robin	Benke	Sep 1989 - May 1990; Feb 2007 - Jan 2010	RAF Lyneham	Pilot
Patrick	Blake	Aug 1978 - Oct 1984; Apr 1996 - May 2010	RAF Lyneham	ALM
Chris, son of Tom	Clark	20th Feb 1950 - 22 Jun 1950	Waterbeach Basingbourn, Oakington	Signals Officer VIP Flights
David	Clifton	May 1987 - May 1989	RAF Lyneham	GD Navigator
Colin	Eames	9 Apr 1979 - 10 Jan 1982	RAF Lyneham	Navigator
Donald	Kilpatrick	Sep 1964 - Jun 1967	RAF Colerne	Pilot
Clarke	McNamara	Sep 2006 - Dec 2008	RAF Lyneham	Pilot
David	Parker	Jun 1996 - Sep 1999; Aug 2003 - Jan 2008	RAF Lyneham	Captain & JTFC Instructor
Wally	Rhodes	1977 - 1979	Lyneham	Pilot
Peter	Richards	1957 - 1960; 1960 - 1962	Colerne; Lyneham	Airframe Mechanic
Lyn	Rogers	July 1973 - Aug 1979	RAF Lyneham	Pilot
Phil	Sharman	Feb 1972 - Oct 1975; Mar 1988 - Jan 1991; Nov 1999 - Feb 2005	RAF Lyneham	Pilot
Chas	Whitaker	Feb 1972 - Sep 1974; Jan 1979 - Aug 1981	RAF Lyneham	Pilot



## Brize and Hendon move - Continued

*(Continued from page 11)*

Captain Houghton, vital: "People will generally put up with technical accommodation of a lower quality, but they expect a decent place to return to at the end of the day." Brize has always been home to families, and this will not change. Defence Estates is demolishing around 600 low-grade properties around the base, and will build some 800 new homes. Interim measures are likely to include both buying and renting existing homes in the area.

"This will require us to think out of the box," says the group captain. "But it is vital that we do not have families outside the 10-mile radius. If a pilot has to drive for an hour to get to work, that is an hour during which he cannot be flying, which has an adverse impact on efficiency. I won't allow that."

There is a green aspect to the project. A network of cycle paths will connect all parts of the base, reducing the need for staff to drive. A longer-term vision allows for large centralised car parks, encouraging people to walk to offices and facilities.

Future Brize is a big undertaking, but Group Captain Houghton is determined to minimise the impact on continuing operations: "For those on the frontline there will be no significant difference. This will be a seamless and transparent move.

*Article from Defence Focus April 2010 Issue 240*

*(Continued from page 9)*

serve with 24 Squadron at various times up to 1942. The first was L5961 which was allocated on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1937 to the Squadron from the first production batch. It was presumably used for trials and training, as there are no existing records of its use for communications duty. Two Magisters L8212 and L8345 were lost in a Hangar fire after a Luftwaffe bombing raid on Hendon in October 1940. 24 Squadron had given up its training role during the Second World War, and it is reasonable to assume that the Magisters held on strength after 1940 were used for communications.

### Miles Mentor

Developed from the Nighthawk, the Mentor was designed in response to an Air Ministry requirement for three seat cabin aircraft to fulfil a variety of roles, including instrument training, night flying, radio training and communications. It was first flown in 1938 and after trials the Mentor was ordered, 20 number specifically to equip 24 Squadron for communications. In the event only 13 were issued to 24 Squadron, the changing circumstances leading up to the outbreak of war leading to

differing aircraft being allocated. Two were destroyed in the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1940 air raid and two further were destroyed in flying accidents. L4395 dived into the ground on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1940 near Hinckley, the Pilot Sgt. R C Edwards and a civilian casualty employed by the Camouflage Department, an attached unit of 24 Squadron, were both killed.

### Percival Vega Gull III

The Vega Gull was a development of the Gull series of aircraft designed by Capt Edgar Percival, an Australian ex WWI pilot. The Gull series owed something to an earlier design the Hendy 302, designed by Basil "Hendy" Henderson and built by George Parnall & Co. Aircraft in Bristol.

The first Gulls were built by Parnalls during 1933-1934 and were the first low wing monoplane offered for sale to the civil market in Britain. In 1938 the RAF ordered 12 Vega Gulls IIIs as communications aircraft, and the first 6 were delivered to 24 Squadron, serials P1749-P1754 in November 1938. 5 more were delivered before the war, from the second batch of 8 aircraft. They were all used extensively in the build up to the fall of France in 1940. P1751 was damaged beyond repair by enemy aircraft on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1940, and P1749 was destroyed in an air raid at Hendon. Vega Gull P1752 was damaged during a forced landing in very bad weather on Wentworth Golf Course in January 1940, luckily no one was injured. The Vega Gull was further developed into the fully militarised Proctor, and more of these were to fly with 24 Squadron after 1940.

### De Havilland DH93 Don

The little known DH93 Don was designed as an advanced trainer, complete with a dorsal turret, and during the expansion of the RAF during the late 1930s was ordered off the "Drawing Board." Sadly the Don proved to be unsuitable for purpose being both under powered, and suffering from handling problems.

As production was well underway a use had to be found, so the turret was deleted and the extra space used for a passenger. The handling issues were partially rectified with anti spinning strakes fitted in front of the fin, and two small fins fitted under the tailplanes. The modified aircraft were issued from March 1938 to the Central Flying School, 3 Flying Training Schools, numerous Station flights, and one Don serial L2394 to 24 Squadron.

They were not successful in their new role and by March 1939 all had been withdrawn, for use as training airframes.

*Original article by our own historical aircraft specialist Simon Batchelor. Aircraft details are available but have been omitted in order to keep all the descriptive text in place. Ed.*



## Diary of a Navigator - Pt 12



**Another instalment from John Mitchell's diary of his VIP flying days with the then Prime Minister Winston Churchill during August 1944.**

### ITALY AGAIN

While we were away, the PM had zealously pursued his ambition to be on the spot wherever the action was. He had visited the Normandy Beach Head within a week of D-Day - stepping foot in France four years to the day since he had flown to Briare with 24 Squadron to try to persuade Marshal Petrain, General Weygand and Darlan to continue the war. This was by sea to the beach head in HMS Kelvin. On the 20th July he was back in France, again by sea, to visit the US forces as well as Monty's Headquarters. A fortnight later on August 5th he made an abortive attempt to visit Cherbourg by air (a 271 Squadron Dakota aircraft) but bad weather forced the aircraft to turn back to Thorney Island much to his disgust; however, he was successful on 7th August. After all this activity he announced that he wanted a few days rest in the sunshine. His idea of a rest was somewhat different from anyone else's. The fortnight he spent in the Italian Theatre was to include a visit to Ajaccio by air in Jumbo Wilson's Dakota 'Freedom' on 14th August, then an offshore visit in HMS Kimberley to the Mediterranean coast of France for Operation DRAGOON - the invasion of Southern France. It also included visits to both General Alexander's and Mark Clark's Headquarters in Italy, entertaining the Greek Prime Minister Papandreou, not to mention Marshal Tito, lecturing the feuding Italian politicians and visiting Rome and Sienna.

It was no great problem for us to 'turn round' the York at Northolt in less than seven days after

HM's trip. Re-victualling and re-stocking of linen, towels, etc had become almost routine (though problems of the wine cellar were becoming rather worse and No 10 had to help out). We had a permanent Rolls-Royce representative available to ensure that we had the best possible after-sales service for the engines and our ground crew knew literally all the wrinkles of 'Ascalon'.

**10th August 1944.** This was to be the last flight in which it would be necessary to approach the Mediterranean Theatre via the Straits of Gibraltar; France was being cleared rapidly of the Germans as the invasion from the south joined the Allied forces from the Normandy area and swept eastwards. German night-fighter aircraft were no longer based in the Brest Peninsula. We were thus able to cut across the Bay of Biscay on a shorter route. We took the PM to Algiers non-stop on this occasion with our passenger complement including Lord Moran, Commander Thompson, Messrs Rowan and Kinnear (secretaries) Inspector Hughes of the CID, and of course, Sawyers the valet.

Flight time was ten hours fifteen minutes: but for headwinds nearly all the way we might have made a faster time. The Night Pullman seemed by habit to take ten hours, give or take a little! No complaints: all the passengers had bunks. Breakfast was served before landing. The PM was met by Mr Duff Cooper through whom a short meeting with General de Gaulle had been proposed but the General was still suffering from being left out of the D-Day Landings and declined the opportunity to meet Mr Churchill, on the grounds he was 'too busy'.

**11th August 1944.** We had three and a half hours on the ground at Maison Blanche, time to clean up and convert the bunks for day time travel. An additional passenger, Brigadier Jacob (General Pug Ismay's deputy) joined the flight.

*(Continued on page 18)*



We took the same route as for HM's flight earlier and a short run of four hours, taken up mainly with serving lunch. It was a smooth flight at 6,000 feet and so once more into Pomigliano at tea time (though this was not a feast on the PM's timetable).

We were to remain seventeen days in and around Naples - the longest, I think, we had been 'stranded' anywhere. But the Owner's moods and requirements were becoming very variable these days and we could not rely on being too far from base at any time. However, I did take the opportunity to fly over to Ban in a USAF Dakota to visit a friend, just for a day trip. We were accommodated once again at the RAF Mess of 65 Staging Post at Portici, better than the transit quarters on the airfield. During this time the PM flew in Jumbo Wilson's Dakota to Elmas (Cagliari) there to embark in the destroyer HMS Kimberley to witness the invasion of Southern France, over the beaches at Cannes - from a safe distance!

**28th August 1944.** We left Naples for home at lunchtime and followed the same route to Rabat as we had done with HM. This time the weather was to be much bumpier. When we started off it was smooth enough, until we reached Tunisia: thereafter, flying at 6,000 feet we flew in and around thunder shower clouds, but there was no avoiding the turbulence. It was typical of conditions caused by a small, active depression in the western Mediterranean. At least most of lunch was enjoyed in comfort. We climbed to 8,000 feet and elected to fly directly through the Straits of Gibraltar and so turn south west to Rabat rather than bump over the Atlas Mountains. We reached our destination at 2000 hours local time and PM was met by the British Consul, his great friend Pat Nairn and taken off to the residence for dinner. I think most of the passengers felt ill from the rough ride and Sawyers, the valet, told us that 'the Master is not at all pleased with you'.

'Dad' Collins and I went straight to the airfield flight planning section to take a look at the route weather forecast for the night. It was more of the

same, only worse, with heavy thunderstorms expected off the Iberian coast. It was clearly 'not on' to fly that night, unless the PM was to face a most unpleasant trip home. In view of his mood so far, the Captain said 'No'. So, off to the Consulate-General to tell the ADC and, inevitably to face the Owner in person. We were both cross questioned to see if there were gaps in our reasoning. Collins was a man of few words, not to be persuaded or bullied and I think the PM recognised this. He accepted the postponement overnight but in view of his requirement to get home as quickly as possible it was accepted that, given the very unlikely event of an encounter with an FW Condor on Atlantic patrol, we could safely make a daylight flight next day. Our attendance at the Consulate gave the PM an opportunity to enquire from the Captain about progress on the Skymaster. It was an ideal chance to explain our misgivings about the bureaucratic goings-on in the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Our earlier visit to Baginton in July, before the Royal Flight, had shown how design-by-committee was holding up the progress. So we were able to give a rather frank account of the frustrations felt by Mr Jimmy Lloyd, the Chief Designer of AWA. We subsequently had reason to believe that one of the PM's famous Minutes flagged 'Action this Day' had winged its way from No 10 to the Minister concerned!

**29th August 1944.** The next day we took off at 1000 hours local and climbed to only 5,000 feet, flying in and out of cloud layers without too much turbulence. Occasional shots of the sun through the gaps gave me some help, but I was very dependent on the radio beacons at Cape Roca (Lisbon) and Corunna, for my navigation. Half way across the Bay we ran out of the high cloud and then had a smooth run for the rest of the flight. Plenty of D/F bearings from the UK Control Station plus sun position-lines brought us up the coast of Cornwall to Chivenor and so on to Northolt in a shade under eight hours. Winds had not been helpful until we had cleared the front but for the last half of the flight we had some support.



This was to be 'Dad' Collins last flight as the PM's pilot. He was time-expired as CO of 24 Squadron and due for posting. It seemed only natural that Bill Fraser, the co-pilot, who frequently flown as Captain when the PM lent the aircraft to others, should achieve the ambition of every pilot to slip over to the Left-Hand Seat. Commander Thompson the ADC thoroughly agreed and he secured the PM's permission. The PM had a well known dislike for new faces or any unavoidable changes in those immediately around him. The proposition was put to the AOC-in-C and to the Chief of Air Staff and approved.

On the change of captaincy of his aircraft, the PM wrote to CAS and asked for the following message to be sent to Collins. "I wish to thank you for the efficient manner in which you have organised my flights and for the care and precision with which they have been carried out under your command. I am grateful too for the excellent arrangements made in the aircraft for my comfort and convenience by yourself and your crew".

I don't think 'Dad' Collins got any outward recognition from the RAF. Van der Kloot had at least collected an honorary OBE (he was an American citizen) for just two overseas tours with the PM. Apart from the AOC-in-C Transport Command himself ('Ginger' Bowhill) and his SASO, AVM Brackley, few appreciated what 'Dad' did to work up this 'private yacht' environment that the PM loved. He was a bit of a loner and somewhat contemptuous of the relative inexperience of the RAF in long-range transport operations. He kept himself to himself very much and did not 'chat up' the lesser Air Officers at Command and Group Headquarters who were anxious to be counted in on the act: many resented his entree to No 10. Jack Payne, too, found that he had to rely almost entirely on his own experience and resources: there were many critics of lesser abilities who hid behind official procedures when something urgent was needed, to be done or to be acquired. In the end, it was 'Dad' Collins who had to shoulder the responsibility, for no one else could make the Captain's decision 'to go' or 'not

to go'.

With the prospect of the Skymaster becoming available from Armstrong Whitworth's in the autumn (not until November, in fact), Bill Fraser was despatched to the USAF Air Transport Command's training base at McDill Field, West Palm Beach, Fla., for a short conversion course on handling the aircraft. Jack Payne had already been attached to the Douglas factory at Santa Monica to learn all he could about its entrails and its maintenance. There would be no one in the RAF higher echelons to whom he could turn for help on this new aircraft.

In the Northolt York Flight office rumours of a Big Three Conference were abroad. I spent September partly on leave and partly on routine flying duties with the Squadron.

As a matter of administrative interest, the York flight of No 24 Squadron was posted en bloc to the Metropolitan Communication Squadron (No 510) at Hendon on the 19th October 1944. This Squadron had been formed from the remnants of miscellaneous communication aircraft used for passenger flying that remained after 24 Squadron itself had become an all-Dakota Squadron. We continued to receive our orders direct via SASO Transport Command and we continued to enjoy a close personal liaison through the ADC with No 10 Downing Street so there was no change in our operational control.



## Memory Banks

### XXIV Squadron in the South Atlantic - Mar 83 to Jun 85

I would now like to take you back 25 years to March 1983 when I took over the stewardship of 24 Sqn. 9 months after the Falklands War ended in Jun '82.

The War brought about a big addition to the role of the Sqn. From being a regular route truckie Sqn, it had now added In-Flight Refueling and Tanker operations to its repertoire.

All the Hercules aircraft at Lyneham were fitted with in-flight refueling probes. And all 4 Sqns had crews trained to fly these aircraft capable of receiving fuel from tanker aircraft.

But only 24 and 30 Sqns operated the Tanker version of the Hercules. These were specially modified aircraft with a hose and drogue assembly installed on the ramp, and additional fuel tanks in the cargo hold. They operated as airborne refueling stations for other aircraft.

By March 1983, in addition to the normal transport tasks around Europe, the Middle East, and North America, and occasionally to the Far East and Australia, the Sqn was heavily committed to the Tanker support of the Hercules Airbridge flying between Ascension Island and the Falklands. And to providing crews for 1312 Flt based at RAF Stanley on the Falkland Islands.

At that time, the Airbridge was the only way of resupplying the Falkland Islands by air. Mount Pleasant Airfield was yet to be built. And the Hercules was the only transport aircraft capable of operating from the airfield at Stanley. But to get there involved in-flight refueling.

Freight and passengers destined for the Falklands were flown from Brize Norton to Ascension Island in the relative comfort of an RAF VC10. After a stop-over, they were then transferred to a Hercules for the onward flight to Stanley. For the passengers, this involved spending a further 12 or 13 hours huddled in the back of a Hercules, alongside the freight, in considerable discomfort, as any of you who have spent any time in the freight bay of a Hercules, will know. But, unusually, some in-flight enter-

tainment was provided. A lucky few were able to come up onto the flight deck to watch the refueling as it took place. Always a popular break in the routine, although it sometimes gave people a bit of a shock to see the back end of another Hercules only a few metres in front of them!

Because the weather at Stanley was often bad and unpredictable – very strong winds, low cloud, rain and snow - safety demanded that the Airbridge should arrive overhead Stanley with sufficient fuel to be able to get to Montevideo in Uruguay, if necessary, some 900 miles away. To achieve this a complicated re-fueling operation had to be mounted from Ascension Island. This normally involved, in addition to the Airbridge aircraft, a Hercules tanker, and a Victor or Vulcan tanker.

The sequence went something like this: Every day, shortly before dawn, the 2 Hercules aircraft would take-off from Ascension at about the same time so as to remain in sight of one another. The Airbridge, and the Hercules Tanker, would continue on South until at about 4 hours out from Ascension the Victor or Vulcan tanker would arrive on the scene to give fuel to the Hercules Tanker. After a further 2 hours, the Airbridge aircraft would fill-up from the Hercules Tanker. At this point the Tanker would turn around for the 6 hour flight back to Ascension Island, and a well earned beer or two, while the Airbridge pressed on to Stanley.

The daily Airbridge was generally flown by crews from 47 & 70 Sqns, while 24 & 30 provided the crews for the tanker support. This meant that the Sqn had a couple of crews deployed to Ascension Island for 2 weeks at a time to operate the Tanker aircraft supporting the southbound Airbridge. During this 2 week period they could expect to do over 60 hours of flying.

While a detachment to Ascension Island would last for 2 weeks, the crews detached to 1312 Flt on the Falkland Islands would be away from home for 4 months. Their role



was to provide tanker support for the fast-jets defending the islands, search and rescue cover, maritime surveillance, and casualty evacuation, as well as doing the occasional mail drop to South Georgia. Fun flying, but the long separation from families and the poor accommodation on coastals, (essentially blocks of floating portacabins which were later deemed to be unsuitable for use even as emergency prisoner accommodation in the UK!) made it an unpopular posting.

Clearly, it was not possible for me spend 4 months away from the Sqn, so I couldn't take on one of these detachments to Stanley myself (although I was posted to the Falklands for 4 months after I left the Sqn). But I did consider it very important that I should play as full a part as I could in the Sqn's tanker operations by doing some of the detachments to Ascension Island. At first, it was difficult to achieve this because my Station Commander at the time refused to allow me to do the Tanker training course. But, with the arrival of a new Station Commander this changed. And in January 1984 I was able to do the course. And shortly after that I was able to go to Ascension Island for my first spell flying the Tanker support for the Airbridge.

Although I couldn't go on detachment to the Falklands, I was keen to see for myself what the guys on 1312 Flt were doing, and what the conditions down there were like for them. I achieved this ambition at the end of my first Ascension Island detachment when I was able to operate the Airbridge to Stanley and back. This was the first of 3 Airbridges I was able to fly during my time with the Sqn.

Dispensing fuel from the Tanker was quite an interesting experience. First you had to calculate how much fuel you could afford to give away. Then you had to make sure it was in the right tanks for the transfer to take place. And finally, when the time came to trail the hose and drogue, the aircraft had to be depressurised. Because the refueling was done at about 20,000 ft, the crew had to go on to oxygen some time before the aircraft was depressurized. During the refueling operation about 30,000 lbs of fuel was trans-

ferred. This took about 30 minutes of close formation flying to achieve.

Taking fuel from the Victor tanker also required a special technique. Because of the disparity in speed between the Victor and the Hercules Tanker, the Victor had to fly a slowly as it reasonably could, while the Hercules had to go fast. It was found that the best way of achieving this combination was to do a manoeuvre called a toboggan. This involved the Victor going into a shallow dive with the Hercules plugged into the drogue trailing behind it. Both aircraft would descend gently (at about 500 fpm) so that, as the fuel was transferred to the Hercules and its weight increased it could still keep-up the necessary speed. During this manoeuvre about 30,000 lbs of fuel would be transferred and the 2 aircraft would descend to end up at something like 5 or 6,000 ft.

Although much of the flying in the South Atlantic was interesting and technically demanding, there were times when it could become pretty tedious. These times were mostly when all the air-to air refueling had been completed. And the Airbridge going on to the Falklands, and the Tanker returning to Ascension, had nothing to do but to fly a in a straight line, over an empty sea, for a further 6 hours. The northbound leg for the Airbridge from Stanley to Ascension Island was also pretty bad. Because of the prevailing winds, and the small island holding diversion fuel requirement, there was generally no need for in-flight refueling. So it consisted of 10 or 11 hours of flying in a straight line, in radio silence, and mostly at night.

Towards the end of my time in command of 24 Sqn another event occurred which was to further expand the role of the Sqn and require the crews to learn new skills. This was the Ethiopian Famine Relief Operation. But that is a story for another day.

*(full text of presentation given by Chris Carington at the 2009 Reunion)*



## Notice Board

A couple of notices for you to read. The first is the new sponsored charity, CALM, that the Squadron has adopted since the closure of Burton Hill House School. See below for a screen shot from its web site. Its internet address is <http://calmcharity.org> Also we have details about accommodation for the Reunion weekend. You are of course free to select anywhere but the coach will only be picking up from the M4/J16 Swindon area.

**CALM**  
Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Movement

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**Who is CALM?**  
CALM charity was originally set up in 1983 by a group of parents who became the first CALM trustees, one of whom designed the original [CALM logo](#). Calm is and always has been run by its parents, patients, their families on a purely voluntary basis, support is also given by medical and other professionals within the community.  
Calm charity works largely from within the Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust area. CALM holds no offices and no administrative salaries are taken, keeping running costs to an absolute minimum. This ensures all the money and resources available can go to the families and children who need it most.  
Through the strength and support of CALM the children who suffer, together with their brothers, sisters and parents, have become one big family giving support to each other, sharing joys and success together as well as the bad times.

### ACCOMMODATION – 2010

#### Holiday Inn Express M4 J16 Swindon



The Deputy Chairman is trying to obtain a discounted group rate but the hotel is heavily booked the October weekend! telephone 0870 990 9690. The [Express Holiday Inn](#) have quoted £45 for a double room plus Continental Breakfast for the weekend of the 2nd October. They don't have a great number available at the moment for our weekend so anyone considering staying there should get in quick. Express by Holiday Inn (West Swindon) Frankland Road, Blagrove Swindon SN5 8UD. [www.hiexpress.co.uk](http://www.hiexpress.co.uk)  
a ps from Sam – The Peterborough Arms, has rooms at about £55 a night inc full english b'fast. (Contact details for The *Peterborough Arms*, *Dauntsey Lock*, Chippenham, Wiltshire Tel:01249 890409).

Alternatives: A weekend break rate may be available at the Hilton Hotel (Tel 01793 881777) which is our nominated get together place on the evening of Friday 1st off base from 7pm onwards. Try the Internet or Teletext for other deals. Over the road is the Premier Travel Inn offering room only rates at around £40 per day, any day of the week and is the cheaper option for couples or families. They may be contacted on 01793 881490 for more details and bookings. Chippenham Tourist Information Office (01249 706333) will give you details of other accommodation in the area and arrange booking for you.

**NOTE - the coach (a snip at only £5/head) will only be picking up guests at the J16 hotels, i.e. Hilton, Express Holiday Inn, Premier Travel Inn.**

**BOOK DIRECT FOR ALL ACCOMODATION.**



## Hawker Memorial - Background



In 2009 a party from J Conversion and Training Flight on XXIV Squadron visited the Somme as part of Exercise Hawker Trail, which traced the path of 24 from its formation at Hounslow Heath via St Omer, the RFC depot, to Bertangles its first operational airfield. They visited many notable sites around the Somme and Ypres, where Hawker won his VC, and laid a cross at his crash site. It was felt that the site deserved a permanent marker and so the Squadron is now planning to erect a memorial to Hawker, to be unveiled on the ninety-fifth anniversary of his death in 2011.

The Mayor of Ligny Thillooy, the nearest village, has agreed to maintain the memorial for the future, and we have the active support of the Somme Remembrance Association in France. The Squadron is setting up the Hawker Memorial Fund to finance the construction and will be inviting donations in the near future. It is hoped to have the design of the memorial finalised in time for the Squadron Association Day in the autumn of 2010.

Major Lanoe Hawker was the first RFC 'ace' and the first fighter pilot to win the VC, for shooting down three German aircraft in a single day, an unheard of feat for that early stage in the war. Given command of No 24 Squadron on its formation in 1915, the first dedicated all – fighter squadron equipped with the new DH2 pusher aircraft, Hawker's personal example and leadership helped to end the 'Fokker scourge' and wrest control of the skies over the Somme away from the Germans. With his personal motto, 'Attack everything', he was very aggressive in the air and even after RFC squadron Commanders were forbidden to operate over the German lines he continued to fly on sorties.

On 23 November 1916 he was flying as wingman on a patrol of four aircraft. Two of the aircraft had turned back due to engine trouble when Hawker spotted a German formation of five new Albatross aircraft, a new fighter that was superior to the DH2. Undeterred, Hawker immediately attacked, and found himself on a duel with a relatively new German pilot, Manfred von Richtofen, who was yet to become the 'Red Baron'. Hawker was the better pilot, but the German had the better aircraft, and their fight was one of the longest of the war, lasting nearly thirty minutes. Hawker scored hits on von Richtofen's aircraft but was unable to cause significant damage.

Eventually, blown ever eastwards by the prevailing wind, out of ammo and low on fuel, Hawker was forced to disengage and make for the British lines. Weaving at low altitude he had almost

*(Continued on page 24)*



## Late News - Summer Social,

### SUMMER SOCIAL - 2nd June in Wiltshire

As you can see from the panoramic photo, it was a wide angle lens day to fit everyone into the frame for this years Summer Social on the 2nd June. We were 40 in total, with a waiting list of hopefuls ready to step in should places become available. This number was a bit unprecedented and put a bit of pressure on the Hotel staff, but they coped very well. Once again, apologies for not having enough space for all.

What a perfect day for this event. As well as XXIV Squadron Association Members we had OC XXIV, W/C Andy Bacon, his Execs, Members' wives, partners and guests who all got together at the farm of Roger and Penny Payne on the 2nd June for pre lunch drinks before moving onto the The Pear Tree at Purton for a long and leisurely meal.

You will see an article about Hawker VC in the Newsletter (page 23/24) but we had it told first hand by Flt Lt Phil Mobbs and you will be hearing more at the AGM.

With so many familiar faces and a few new kids on the block catching up on news and gossip proved very difficult indeed. In was not quite at the stage of leaving conversations in mid sentence before we went our different ways but almost came to saying - "I'll finish that story off and the Reunion in October".

Thanks to John Martin for his patience in getting everyone to stop taking and face the front for this great photo.



**Big turn out for the this years Summer Social at Braydon and Purton 2nd June 2010**

*(Continued from page 23)*

made it across when von Richtofen made another attack, Hawker turned to face it but with his final burst before his guns jammed the German hit him in the head, killing him instantly. Hawker's aircraft crashed just behind the German third line trench, and he was buried next to the wreck. He was just twenty-five years old.

The Lewis machine gun from the aircraft was taken by von Richtofen and given pride of place in his collection of aircraft parts from his 'kills', as befits what he later described as his greatest victory.

